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Israel: Military Options in Lebanon

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An Intelligence Memorandum

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*NESA 81-10066
December 1981*

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*Information available as of 16 December 1981
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

The authors of this paper are [redacted]
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Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and
may be addressed to the Chief, Arab-Israeli Division,
NESA, [redacted]

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Summary

Israeli officials are expressing growing concern over the Palestinian arms buildup and the continued presence of Syrian surface-to-air missile sites in Lebanon. The Israelis claim that the Palestinians have continued to receive additional heavy weapons since the cease-fire and are taking advantage of the lull in hostilities to reequip and train their forces in southern Lebanon. They also maintain that the Palestinians are increasing the pressure on Christian forces in the border enclave in the south and that UNIFIL has been ineffective in stopping Palestinian infiltration into the area. Despite Tel Aviv's resolve to maintain the cease-fire as long as possible, Defense Minister Sharon and Chief of Staff Eitan have stated publicly that Israel will respond at once if provoked by renewed Palestinian attacks on Israel's northern settlements.

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Israel has a variety of military options it can exercise against the Palestinians in southern Lebanon and the Syrian missile sites, ranging from preemptive airstrikes to launching a large-scale ground operation. The buildup of the Israel Defense Force in northern Israel following the government's de facto annexation of the Golan Heights has also significantly improved its ability to move into Lebanon in force.

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Should the Palestinians resume their artillery attacks on Israel's northern settlements or launch a major terrorist operation inside Israel, the Israelis would most likely respond with a major incursion into southern Lebanon to clean out Palestinian forces south of the Zahrani River. They would probably engage the Syrians if they attempted to aid the Palestinians. Such an engagement probably would include an attack on the Syrian SAMs in the Bekaa Valley.

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